

## Message

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**East Chicago press clips****US EPA Region 5 – prepared by the Office of Public Affairs****January 11, 2017**

<http://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/epa-lead-clean-up-in-eastside-indy-neighborhood>

**EPA Lead Clean Up In East Side Indy Neighborhood**

News • [Local News](#) / January 9, 2017

Leigh DeNoon



Elizabeth Gore, Chairperson of Martindale-Brightwood Environmental Justice Collaborative  
*Leigh DeNoon*

Soil sampling continues this winter in the Martindale-Brightwood neighborhood, but removal of lead contaminated soil is on hold until it's warm enough for backhoes to return.

Twelve years ago, at the direction of the EPA, the National Lead Company, removed lead tainted soil from over 200 lawns adjacent to its former smelter at 21st and Hillside. That smelter shut down in the 1960s and burned. What wasn't known during the first lead clean up in 2005 was that toxic contamination extended farther into the community than just the wind could have carried it. Experts believe the slag and other lead smelting by-products were used as fill for lawns throughout the area.

In her temporary field office in the neighborhood a few weeks ago, geologist Shelly Lam showed where the work is happening, "The map you see over here, we're going to be testing inside that area and outside that area," Lam says.

As the on-scene coordinator for the EPA, Lam wants to test as many lawns as possible to make sure as much tainted soil as possible is removed this time.

Soil samples come back to the temporary office in small glass jars and are initially tested for contamination.

"So, we call this our soil kitchen," Lam says, "and it's our laboratory for processing soil before we send the soil samples to the lab. And we put them in one of the ovens for two to three hours to drive off moisture," she says.

Once they're dry, they undergo more sophisticated tests to look for the chemical element antimony, which was used in car batteries and car batteries were smelted between the 1940s and 1960s. The antimony link to today's contaminated yards is what was needed to activate the \$5 million in EPA Superfunds for the clean up.

Outside a home in the neighborhood last fall, Lam tracked the work of contractors as a backhoe filled a dump truck with soil.

"You can see where they've removed a foot to two feet of soil. We test continuously as we're digging," she says. "I know that we've already tested some of the side walls here confirmed that we don't need to go in the directions that we can. And they've also started testing the bottom," Lam says.

Neighborhood residents founded the Martindale-Brightwood Environmental Justice Collaborative when high levels of lead were first discovered a dozen years ago. Longtime neighborhood resident Elizabeth Gore is the chairperson of the group. She has expressed confidence in Lam, appreciates weekly EPA status updates, and is satisfied with this clean up to date.

"So what we're looking for this time, because neighbors are a little dubious, is that we will get proper grading, we will get the proper kind of soil put back in the yards and so far I've noticed, they're doing a better job," Gore says.

She wants to make sure kids today stay healthy – and don't play in toxic soil like her kids unknowingly did.

"It doesn't give you a very good feeling to know that your children were playing in lead," she says.

"And so in this neighborhood we know that there are some learning disabilities. We understand that there are some health issues."

Through the Healthy Homes program, the Marion County Health Department offers free lead testing for young children who live in or visit the neighborhood.

Twenty-eight of the 48 contaminated lawns identified so far have been removed and replaced with clean fill. While the current funds will remediate about 100 lawns, Lam says sampling continues to see if the area qualifies for the EPA National Priorities List.

"If it scores and is placed on the national priorities list, that will bring a great deal of funding," she says.

Lam says if it doesn't qualify but the need exceeds current funding, she will apply for more.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-ptb-ec-lead-loan-carrie-gosch-bill-st-0111-20170110-story.html>

## Politicians voice support for East Chicago disaster relief

Northwest Indiana politicians are urging the state to grant a disaster declaration for East Chicago.

U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Merrillville, on Monday at a town forum at East Chicago City Hall, pledged to support the city's request to former Gov. Mike Pence and Gov. Eric Holcomb requesting a disaster declaration to leverage resources to deal with lead contamination in the Calumet neighborhood, and state Sen. Frank Mrvan submitted a bill giving the city \$2.5 million in relief funds.

"I am delighted to support the city's request," Visclosky said.

What he was not as pleased about is the work of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Visclosky said he's continued to push the EPA to take action in the contaminated neighborhoods, especially in light of water testing results that found elevated levels of lead in residents' drinking water.



Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Merrillville, discusses the three areas in East Chicago that have been taken over by industry including Marktown and the Calumet site. (Jim Karczewski / Post-Tribune)

The EPA monitored water quality of the eastern zones of the U.S.S. Lead Superfund site during remediation work in the neighborhood, and found that 18 of the 43 homes where the water was tested exceeded 15 parts per billion of lead – the EPA's threshold for water safety.

"I am very, very unhappy with the Environmental Protection Agency and how they have handled that issue," Visclosky said.

The congressman said he's asked the EPA to look into what's the cause of the lead in the water and find resources to take corrective action, and offer testing to the neighbors of people whose water testing positive for contaminants.

The Rev. Cheryl Rivera, executive director of the Northwest Indiana Federation of Interfaith Organizations and associate pastor of the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in East Chicago, said the community needs support to put pressure on state and federal officials to approve the disaster declaration.

"We need that done immediately," Rivera said.

The city submitted its request for a disaster declaration in December.

"The residents of my city, my staff, other local officials and I have been laboring under conditions which are not of our making, but which cry out for help," Mayor Anthony Copeland wrote to Pence on Dec. 1.

Copeland noted, in the letter, that Indiana code defined a disaster as "being an occurrence or imminent threat of widespread severe damage, injury, loss of life or property damage from a utility failure, public health emergency, blight or other public calamity."

The resources of East Chicago are strained to the "point of breaking," Copeland wrote, and resources from the state are needed to adequately respond to the continuing crisis.

Mrvan's bill, which was sent to the Appropriations Committee for review, would take money from the Department of Homeland Security and disburse it to eligible agencies dealing with lead and arsenic contamination in East Chicago. Should the bill pass, \$2.5 million would be available to the city during the next two budget years.

Mrvan was unavailable for comment Monday.

While a final ruling on the disaster declaration is pending, Visclosky said he remains in contact with the EPA, Department of Housing and Urban Development and city.

"We are doing everything we can," Visclosky said.

Visclosky said he's met with HUD Secretary Julian Castro and talked about ensuring resources are available for the residents of the West Calumet Housing Complex who are relocating and finding money for the demolition of the complex once it's vacant.

There are pots of money available, Visclosky said, but those are targeted for specific programs. East Chicago has applied for other federal dollars, he said, but those are competitive programs.

City attorney Carla Morgan said given the tone of the incoming administration's tenor of less regulation, what it might mean for cleanup projects like the one in East Chicago is a matter for speculation.

"I am very concerned what the new administration may want to do with EPA," Visclosky said.

[http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/visclosky-updates-residents-on-east-chicago-lead-crisis/article\\_0413df7b-e94d-5f11-93c2-8a827b327be2.html](http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/visclosky-updates-residents-on-east-chicago-lead-crisis/article_0413df7b-e94d-5f11-93c2-8a827b327be2.html)

### **Visclosky updates residents on East Chicago lead crisis**

EAST CHICAGO — U.S. Rep. Pete Visclosky, D-Merrillville, said Monday he was unhappy with how EPA handled the release of information about lead found in drinking water at 18 of 43 homes in the USS Lead Superfund site.

The congressman told residents at a forum at City Hall the EPA failed to tell individual homeowners the cause of the high lead results in their water and the resources available to them.

The city's water filtration plants meet all federal and environmental standards, and they are not the source of the lead in residents' drinking water, Visclosky said.

Chris Korleski, EPA Region 5 water division director, said after the meeting that employees from the federal agency called each of the residents in early December about drinking water testing. EPA employees read from a prepared script, which stated it's likely a large percentage of service lines in East Chicago are made from lead.

"We thought that we were making it clear here that the issue was in the service lines or the home's plumbing," Korleski said.

Residents at each of the 43 homes tested were given water filters with instructions on how to maintain them, he said. EPA worked with the city and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management during the week residents were notified, and documents posted at the city's website state how lead gets into drinking water, he said.

The city recently announced EPA found high lead levels in water at some of the homes in the Superfund site as part of a pilot program to determine if excavation would cause lead to flake from service lines and enter the water supply. The high lead levels were found before excavation was started; EPA has not yet released results from post-excavation testing.

City officials have said the lead came from aging service lines, not the city filtration plants or water mains. East Chicago, like many cities in the United States, has many aging lead service lines.

City and EPA officials have said no additional water testing is planned.

IDEM advised the city in September to change its corrosion control blend to further prevent lead from leaching into the into customer service lines, documents show. The change will help protect all city residents, officials said.

Visclosky said he is working to designate a staff member in his office to work specifically with Superfund residents. His office is also researching funding to provide water filters to residents, he said.

"I cannot promise anything, but we will continue to work as hard as possible," he said.

Several residents asked if Visclosky would support a request for an emergency declaration to bring in additional funding to deal with the crisis.

The congressman said Mayor Anthony Copeland submitted a request for a declaration to the governor's office, and residents will need to inquire in Indianapolis about its status.

Visclosky also reiterated that he and other elected federal officials are seeking funding for demolition of the West Calumet Housing Complex while simultaneously working on identifying funding to help its more than 1,000 residents relocate. About one-third of the families at the complex have moved, he said.

Lead and arsenic contamination in the soil at the complex in some cases was found to be more than 200 times the EPA's allowable limit for residential use. The complex is located in one of three residential cleanup zones in the USS Lead Superfund site, which includes the entire Calumet neighborhood and the USS Lead factory site off Kennedy Avenue.

The EPA began cleanup in the middle and eastern parts of the neighborhood last summer but suspended work for the winter. Lead in the soil is not related to lead in the drinking water, officials said.

Sincerely,

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